

The background of the cover is a complex, abstract texture. It features a mix of colors including deep blues, vibrant greens, earthy browns, and hints of red and purple. The texture is grainy and layered, resembling a collage or a heavily textured print. The overall effect is rich and multi-dimensional.

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Editor's Note

What is a self portrait? What do we learn about ourselves when take a selfie, or when we paint our draw ourselves, or even when we write a story or a poem? Any art we make, even if it seems to have nothing to do with us, comes out of our mind. This means our ideas, perspectives, and interests have played a role in its creation. In this way, you could say that any story—whether about characters who resemble us or not—is a kind of self-portrait. Same for a poem, a photograph, a painting, or a collage. What we create says something about who we are. In this issue, we have two direct self-portraits. I encourage you to think about what the two very different portraits say about the two artists, but I also encourage you to think of the other work in here as “self-portraits.” What does the work tell you about its creator? What does your own work say about you?

Letters: Do you have something to say about something you've read or seen in *Stone Soup*? If you do, we'd love to hear from you, and we might print your letter on our Letters to the Editor page! Post a comment on our website, or write to us at editor@stonesoup.com.

Submissions: Our guidelines for submission are on the Submit page at stonesoup.com, where you will also find a link to our Submittable online submissions portal.

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On the cover:
'No Boundaries,' *acrylic*

by Christian Goh, 9
Dallas, TX

StoneSoup

Contents

STORIES

4

Boxes

by Melina Ahmad

Azalea tries to ignore the boxes stacked in Ronia's home, but eventually her best friend will have to go

10

My Grandma Helen

by Sadie Perkins

When Maggie's grandma dies, she struggles to understand what it means to be "gone"

16

Garage Junk

by Jerry Xia

A quick trip to the garage fridge for some lemonade turns into an odyssey when a spider appears

20

Echoes

Cate struggles to come to terms with her sister's death

by Bailey Curtin

POETRY

8

The Red Balloon...

by Rafi Mohammed

9 Searching for Bows and Arrows

by Tatiana Rebecca Shrayer

18 A Dream of Chaos

by Atlas William Iacobucci

ART

Cover: No Boundaries

by Christian Goh

6 Parade of Clouds

by Asfia Jawed

14 Bubble Bee

by Christian Goh

15 Self-Portrait

by Alexander McCullough

19 The Only Life in Death Flower

by Delaney Slote

23 HONOR ROLL

Boxes

Azalea tries to ignore the boxes stacked in Ronia's home, but eventually her best friend will have to go

Ronia's black curls bob at the edge of my vision, her toffee face connected to twisting shoulders that sweep past the bodies of sweating parents, yakking teens, and pleading children. A shiny green sign twinkles with a line of sunlight, the white text saying "Atlantic Ave" invisible where the light hits the bumpy material. Air hisses through a hole in the thick plastic material next to me, pulsing as feet make contact with its airy brilliance. The sun watches over us, its warmth touching our faces and necks and burning us with its loving gaze. The wind joins in with the chorus of voices that ride over the thumping speakers like birds chirping out a melody while floating in the clouds. I eye a dolphin balloon that floats above the crowd, blue shimmer against a blue sky. The way it shines in the sun holds my vision as if challenging me to buy a grip on its bright string. I gather some cotton from my dad's shirt in my fist and tug, gaining his attention.

"Yes, Azalea?"

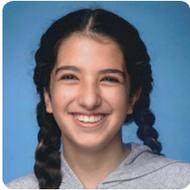
I point at Ronia with one hand, and the balloon with the other. "Ronia's over there," I say, "And I want that." I watch a kid with a red shirt near the balloon stand and narrow my eyes menacingly. "I want that now," I add. Ronia's face appears next to mine, face broken into a smile.

"Azalea!" She throws her arms open.

"Ronia!" I laugh and throw my arms around her. My hand wraps around her until it reaches the opposite side of her, where it rests, on the skin between her shoulder and neck.

My hand is wrapped around the balloon, the slight tug goes up my arm and into my heart as I walk down Atlantic Avenue, hand in hand with Ronia. When we see something we like, we gallop towards it, like our hands are cemented together and never will part.

As we walk to the East River, the outline of Ronia's building becomes visible against the pale blue sky. It grows larger the more our legs burn, the more asphalt we step across, the more words we set free. It grows so large it obscures my vision, the details of the front door more than the details of the building as a whole. We enter and walk to the elevator with its old, leathery smell, like the building is a prize someone tried to wash too many times. My faded sandals cross the gap lined with metal, high-fiving the floor—thwack—a game played with Ronia's pink and my blue sandals. Her feet are golden brown criss-crossed with blue plastic; mine, a birch tree, laden with celebratory ribbons, blue as a bluebird. The white lights flash on the elevator wall: Floor 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. The elevator counts with me, 6 years,



by Melina Ahmad, 11
Brooklyn, NY

6 floors. Through the doorway, our sandals thwack.

It looks like the walls are holding negative space, like all the framed memories were forgotten. Ronia's house used to be covered with pictures; nature, us, family, memories. But now all I see are nails sticking out of white walls, empty and holding nothing. Then I notice the bumpy, wood-colored boxes, green words on the sides, clinging onto the material as if they were scared to let go. But I shake my head and ignore these things, happy to be with Ronia.

When the sun reaches its home below the horizon, we watch the streaks of light glint on the dark choppy water. We take the subway home, the vision of the boxes bumping with the train. I hold the balloon to my chest, making the ends of my hair static. I frown; my tights itch, and so do my questions. My voice comes out, light as silver, but heavy with the questions. "Why were there boxes?" I ask, looking up at my parents. They share a look.

"Azalea. We have some bad news to tell you," they say, "But we can't tell you right now." So I wait until we get off the train and into the house before they talk again. "Ronia is moving to California." They place their hands on my shoulders, but nothing can stop

the flood of tears that stream down my cheeks, my blue eyes magnified with the salty water that floods my vision. The river reminds me of the time we spent frolicking in the springs upstate, allowing cool, clear water to surround our boots, laughing when it went above the rubber protection and tickled our feet. My eyes burn when I rub them, and salty water covers my face. My mind creates an image of the time when we galumphed through the snowy woods with little crackling walkie-talkies in our hands. The time we sat atop our fathers' shoulders and held hands way up high, like our heads were not only in the clouds but they were the clouds. The time I ate her birthday cupcake when she was in the bathroom, and the time she ate mine the next year. The time we ate the apples from the ground while apple-picking. The time we put on a show for our families and sang and danced and played.

I sleep with those memories floating through my head that night.

The next day, Ronia comes over with her family, and we all sit at the oak dining room table. I pout at everything, everyone. I woke up in the morning with a black cloud over my head, and my eyes raining spontaneously. Thunder booms when it wants, lightning strikes as it sees fit.



Parade of Clouds, *photography*



by Asfia Jawed, 12
Portland, ME

They explain: California offers a job that New York does not. Where Craig (Ronja's father) goes, so do they. I glower some more.

Craig looks over and says, "Azalea..."

I don't let him finish. I go to my room, but arms catch me from behind and I turn into Ronja's arms, extending my body around hers. We stand, wrapped around each other, and laugh through our tears.

The Red Balloon...

by Rafi Mohammed, 10
Newcastle upon Tyne, UK



When sea captains say they have sailed the seven glimmering seas, I have flown them. When climbers say they have climbed the highest peaks, including the monstrously tall Mount Everest, I have achieved higher heights. When tourists say they have travelled all over the world, I have done it more times than I can count. But I am only a vivid dark, red balloon with a loose white string.

My master was really playful, he was about 7 when I left him. One day he lost his grip and I rushed towards the blue sky like a graceful bird dancing. From that second on, it was my quest to find him.

A few years later, I navigated the winds as they talked to me and told me where to go. I crossed the golden sand beaches, crystal clear, transparent, ice-cold glaciers. I have felt the slight tickle of the lush green grass of the forever blooming countryside. I have felt the burning scars of crashing into cliffs or skyscrapers.

One morning, I smashed into a fence where a bunch of bags told me to go to the vortex in Antarctica. Soon I let go of the fence and rushed into the sea. Then I spent years trying to find it. I mastered the currents of the water as I mastered navigating the wind. Finally after a few years, I found it. I was free! No more political roars no more cars or horns. I was free! I found myself in a freezing pool surrounded by millions of other balloons. But every moment I thought of my master. Someday, somehow, sometime and somewhere I will find him...

Searching for Bows and Arrows



by Tatiana Rebecca Shraye, 9
Brookline, MA

Because I wanted to feel like an Amazon
I asked my father to build me a bow with arrows
We went to the nearby woods that overlook
Forest Beach in the village of South Chatham.

My father, sister and I followed
A wavy uphill path to the clearing
Where we found young oak trees
With pointy strong branches,

We sawed off three branches
That looked like they would suffice.
We carved them and sanded them,
And we bent them till they could sing.

By the time we had finished tying the string
The evening chill had descended.
We shot our arrows into the darkening sky
Where the stars scampered like red foxes.

My Grandma Helen

When Maggie's grandma dies, she struggles to understand what it means to be "gone"

I walk into the cold, barren waiting room. It smells like stale peppermints and dust bunnies. My dad has his hand on my shoulder, and I feel the warmth through my jacket. It's the only thing I can feel right now.

The clerk stands behind the desk, typing loudly on her giant computer. Her lips are glistening with bright fuchsia lipstick, and the mascara is clumped on her eyelashes. She has a gigantic smile plastered on her face, and it makes bile wash into my throat.

"Hello," she sings, tossing back her streaming, golden hair.

"Good evening," my dad greets her, with cheer that comes out of nowhere.

I keep my mouth shut.

"Would you like a mint, dear?"

her voice pierces the still room. She plunges her manicured hand into the giant glass jar on the desk and shoves the plastic-wrapped candy into my hand before I can say no.

"We're here to see Helen Browne," my dad continues, his words smooth and in just the right tone.

I don't know how he does that: somehow knows exactly what people want to hear and exactly how to deliver it. My mama calls him a "people person." She says that he couldn't be any more different than her. My mama gets this scratched-by-a-cat look whenever anyone says something she doesn't like. Her lips disappear inside her mouth and her eyes squeeze shut

and she clenches her coffee-colored hands against her skirt.

"Oh, yes," the lady responds. Her name tag says Patty. I don't like that name. It reminds me of the cafeteria ladies at school, hairnets stretched over their giant buns, glopping food onto plastic lunch trays.

I don't know what happens next. All I know is that my dad puts his hand firmly on my shoulder again, and then we're moving down the hallway and I stare at the green and black carpeting. Dad opens the door and we enter a cold, gray room that smells like clay. A single bed sits in the middle, and there sits my grandma. My heart drops and bursts open, pouring out love. My feet move me forward.

Grandma Helen has been there for me since I was born. My whole life I felt like I had to hide my emotions everywhere except my own home. Me, Mama, Dad, Jasmine, Nathan, Grandma and me. Grandma and I would sit for hours on the porch rocking chairs, and sometimes not even say anything, just sit there thinking about the dewdrops glistening on the sharp blades of grass, and the clouds fading and the stars twinkling in the night sky. I would look over at her and her eyes would be closed and she'd just be humming to herself, and once in a while she'd nod and smile. Sunday nights were for a huge family dinner that everyone would help make.



by Sadie Perkins, 13
Madison, WI

Everyone would sit around the table, laughing and talking and eating all at the same time.

I see Grandma sitting on the bed, back propped against two white pillows. She's not who she used to be. The color has drained from her face. The wrinkles have stretched all across her skin. She's here in this cold, sad building, not home with us painting her nails and experimenting with makeup. She's not in the kitchen with flour and sugar all over her, cooking all day. She's not surprising Dad with ice cold lemonade after he'd been gardening all afternoon, or giving Mom massages after a long day of law school. She looks over at us.

"Mom!" Dad cries out. "It's me."

Grandma cocks her head and looks right at him.

"Adam?" she whispers.

"Yes, Mom," Dad whispers. "It's me."

I walk over.

"Oh, my babies," Grandma whispers. She grabs Dad's hand and pulls him close, and she wraps me in her arms. She kisses my cheek. And she lies back down on her bed.

"Mom?" Dad whispers, and then I watch as her chest slows, and then stops, and her body is still.

I run forward and grab her hand, squeezing it like I can bring it back to life, but I can't, and then Dad is wrapping me in his arms and I feel him

but I can't think, and I just know that all of a sudden it feels like someone has thrown me off a sinking ship and I smack the water, and feel a rock hit hard against my head.

My grandma had been such a big part of my life, it didn't seem right that she was just gone. She wasn't afraid to put my dad in his place around the house, but she was always so sweet to my mom. She always told her, "Aisha, you need to relax."

Whenever I came home from school, my grandma Helen was always in the kitchen. She was a cook like a lot of grandmas I knew, but she was different. She didn't just bake pies and cakes. Grandma Helen made Duck à l'Orange and Beef Wellington. Every week, she tried out a new recipe, and every day she was at the table, thumbing through her cookbook and flipping through *Taste of Home*.

The other thing she liked to do was listen to music, from Beethoven and Brahms to heavy metal. You could always hear music coming from her upstairs bedroom. Once, I peeked in her room and she had on her best purple evening gown and she appeared to be waltzing with an imaginary person. Her eyes were closed in bliss.

On Saturday nights, she would move the antique wood coffee table,

It was barren and empty and cold, just like the nursing home where she had spent her last few months.

leather couches, and our huge rocking chair that smelled like coffee and mothballs, so the entire living room was open. She'd put out bowls of popcorn and cups of apple juice and iced tea, which was her favorite drink in the world. We'd wrap ourselves in blankets and watch an old movie, and sometimes fall asleep spooned together on the living room floor.

Grandma always told us that she wanted us to love ourselves, and we would love others. Ever since we were babies, she told Jasmine, Nathan, and me that she loved us more than life itself. She told us that nowadays you're supposed to only care for everyone else, and not care for yourself. But that, she told us, was impossible. You can't care for others if you're not happy. You can't treat others with respect if you feel you don't owe it to yourself. She told us that if we saw ourselves as wonderful, that was how we'd see the world. She told us more times than Albert Einstein could count that we could only truly love ourselves if we were ourselves and didn't pretend to be anyone else. If you act like someone else and you love that someone else, you don't really love your true self. Everyone is different. Nobody is any more "normal" or "regular" than anybody else. That was what she told us, up until the day she died.

For a long time afterwards, I lay in my room while everyone rushed

around, preparing for the funeral: buying black clothes, calling people, and not really saying anything, making sandwiches nobody ate. I didn't know what to think. I always got annoyed when people said someone was "gone" because it was just a sugar-coated way of saying they were dead. But now I understood. Saying somebody is dead is just saying the literal fact. They are gone. They are gone from your life, gone from their life. I could feel the place in my heart where Grandma had lived. It was barren and empty and cold, just like the nursing home where she had spent her last few months. I couldn't understand how a person could just vanish, all the life gone from them.

This is why it doesn't matter how someone looks. When they die, everything about them: who they are, what they think, what they like, what they want is all gone. All that's left is a body of skin and bones. The thought sent a shiver up my spine. It seemed impossible someone that nobody could see or knew even existed could just take everything from someone whenever they felt like it. Sure, you could try to fight it, but it was just a matter of time until you surrendered.

Everyone was going about their business normally, but I knew that they were not the same either. Grandma was a huge part of our family, and now she was missing. Like the one piece that fell off the beautiful, intricate puzzle and got chewed up

by the dog. I was mad at this person, whoever and wherever they were, for taking Grandma away. I buried my face in my pillow. I didn't cry. I never cried. At least that's what I was telling myself. But I could feel the tears, filling my eyes. I remembered how Grandma would always sit next to me and stroke my hair when I cried. I would feel her hands, running through my hair, not saying anything, just letting me cry, and somehow telling me without saying anything that she loved me more than life itself. I could almost feel her now. I could... I could! I jumped up and turned around. I didn't see anything but I could smell Grandma's rosemary shampoo and I could feel her hand holding mine.

"Grandma?" I whispered into the air.

Yes, it's me, Maggie.

"Are you really there?"

I know it might seem like I am gone, but I will always be here.

"That's what everyone says."

It's true. My heart may have stopped but my soul lives forever. My love for my family knows no bounds, and that includes lifespans. It will stick with you forever.

I opened my mouth to reply, but all of a sudden she had vanished. And just at that moment, the empty space in my heart filled and opened up to a flood of gold and sweet and

everything that was Grandma. She was still here.

From then on, I knew that even though my grandma was dead, she could still love me, and everyone else she had always loved. She was watching over us, protecting us every second.

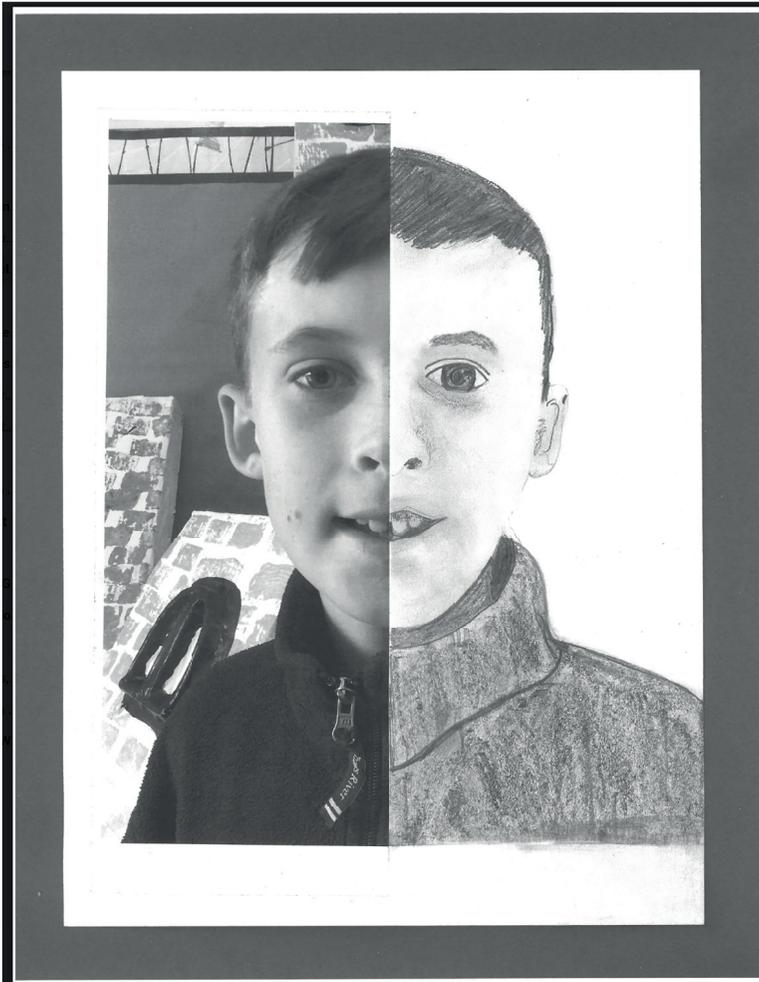
I love you, Grandma. And I'm going to make you proud of me.



Bubble Bee, *acrylic*



by Christian Goh, 11
Dallas, TX



Self-Portrait, *mixed media*



by Alexander McCullough, 11
Marblehead, MA

Garage Junk

by Jerry Xia, 11
Palo Alto, CA



Few things could make me enter the garage at night but thirst was one of them. Although the space was lit by a bright, automatic light on the garage door mechanism, the lighting always felt inadequate. On one side, a refrigerator stood like a steel grandfather clock next to shelves of old junk. Nearby were a couple of tool shelves and a working table. Next to the door was a shoe rack full of old shoes that looked unwearable. On the other side, a massive yellow boiler hissed next to a filing cabinet full of old papers. Everywhere were shadows that reminded me of graveyards at night.

After I stepped into the garage to get a bottle of lemonade, I noticed a huge spider slowly walking across its web above the refrigerator. It was as slow as a snail and bigger than a quarter. It was brown with a round head and an oval body. Looking at it made me feel small, as if something was wrong, as if I had my back turned to a massive beast with red eyes.

Trying to not disturb the creature, I tiptoed very slowly to the refrigerator. My thirst was more motivational than my fear, but I moved with the speed of a broken wind-up toy car. As I slowly opened the refrigerator door, the spider positioned itself almost directly above my head. I could see it, and I was sure it could see me. With the carefulness of the snakeman who

caught green mambas with his bare hands, I opened the door. Quickly but silently, I grabbed the drink and felt the coolness of the bottle. Just as I was closing the refrigerator door and carefully watching the spider, thinking I was safe, the garage light turned off.

I had forgotten that the light detected movement, and maybe my slow movements had been too slow for it to recognize my presence. But waving my arms to turn it back on would alert the spider, so I just stood there. In darkness. The spider and me. Right then, I knew that my fear was like swiss cheese, full of holes. All I had to do was face the fear and eat it. After all, what is a spider but a hairy, air-breathing arachnid with eight legs and fangs that inject venom? And how many people die each year from spider bites? Two? Five? A hundred?

The garage was absolute darkness except for the moonlight shining in through a window next to the refrigerator. I could almost feel the spider's thin legs crawling slowly across my head. For a tiny moment I thought about what I would do. I had several options: I could throw the bottle of lemonade in my hands at the spider, I could run, or I could shout for help. However, throwing the bottle of lemonade at the spider would mean dislodging it from its web, and then I wouldn't be able to locate it. It would be angry and suddenly crawling around

A quick trip to the garage fridge for some lemonade turns into an odyssey when a spider appears

in the mess of lemonade on the floor, somewhere near my slipper-clad feet. Shouting would only alert it of my presence. Running would mean risking crashing into things that I couldn't see in the dark.

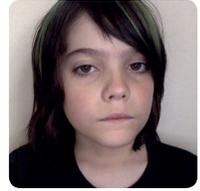
With no options left, I nearly panicked, but I told myself that my fear of spiders was irrational. Spiders are mostly just small bugs that slowly crawl around eating flies that occasionally get trapped in their webs. A spider would have no reason to descend on my head, no reason to chase me, no reason to bite me. After all, I was a thousand times larger than the spider, and the spider was probably more afraid of me than I was of it!

Realizing this, I decided the best option was not to run, not to shout, not to throw a bottle of lemonade, but just to simply walk away. I closed the refrigerator door as silently as I could and started to exit the garage. Calmly, I avoided boxes and racks full of items that might otherwise have tripped me while I was running. As I approached the doorway of the garage, I turned on the garage light. When I looked back from the door, I saw the spider very slowly walking toward me on its web in the corner of the garage. I looked at the spider and I thought it looked at me and I thought about how spiders are their own individual selves, just like humans. They are just trying to survive and live longer. People are cruel to spiders just because they look

strange, while in reality, all spiders do is keep the bugs out of our homes.

Then I shut the door and dashed into my room, thinking about what I had just done. For several minutes, I sat in the chair at my desk and considered the other spider in the bathroom, the small one that lives in the corner behind the toilet. The next day, I moved the whole package of lemonade to the refrigerator in the kitchen to let the garage spider have its space. After my encounter with the spider, I've made an effort to recognize that spiders are not the monsters they appear to be, but harmless creatures that do their own thing. I still don't like them in the same room with me, but my fear of them is a half-eaten piece of swiss cheese.

A Dream of Chaos



by Atlas William Iacobucci, 9
New Haven, CT

The sound of thunder and rain thrashing around,
clinging to the Empire State Building.
As it flails and turns, I jump
through the window.
As the small bang of me landing
gets swallowed by the sound of thunder,
I jump down the narrow stairs
just as I hear fireworks.
And then I see it.
The tiles flying in the air.
I hear a small voice.
It gets louder and louder
until I see a huge flash of light.
And then New York is all fine.
And giant whale-like things flying
are just the sound of morning doves.



The Only Life in Death Flower, *photography*



by Delaney Slote, 11
Missoula, MT

Echoes

by Bailey Curtin, 11
Ottawa, Canada



Cate struggles to come to terms with her sister's death

It's in my head. Bouncing around like a beach ball. Jade's last words to me. "Shut it, Cate, and let me die in peace." She'd smiled, squeezed my hand, and then she was gone.

I'm walking. Walking on a PEI beach in my sweatshirt and pajama pants and flip-flops with my dark hair tangled and down, with a very special something in my pocket. It sags down, far down, but no one else is here and, to be honest, I don't care.

The sun is beginning to rise and I inhale through my nose sharply. It's the same sunset, the same feeling as the first morning without my sister. It's a sinking feeling, the way I felt when we lost our pet fish. But worse, much, much worse, than that.

Jade was always strong and no one ever, ever expected her to die. She was the star centre on her competitive soccer team, the second-best on her track team, and she went to the gym every Tuesday and Thursday. But the brain tumor came so quickly that it couldn't be stopped.

I take out the tiny marble box from my pocket and finger it between gloved hands. Jade's ashes, some at least. I'd stolen it from Mom's dresser. Remembering the day that she had the tumor, I stiffen and put it back.

It started with a simple headache at school; her teacher said she was

fine and her friends insisted she could stay. A migraine when she got home—Mom's aspirin didn't work. "It'll be done by morning," Dad had assured her. I could hear Jade crying from her room—then it turned to screaming and things went downhill from there.

She was throwing up, feeling dizzy, but her headache was the worst. Mom realized how bad it was and took her to the Montague hospital. I stayed home.

"Is Jade gonna be okay?" I had asked. Dad sighed and turned away from me. His phone rang and he answered it. "She's being moved to Charlottetown," he reported.

Souris to Montague, Montague to Charlottetown, Charlottetown to Halifax. In Halifax they determined she had a brain tumor, and Dad used some of the little money we had to fly us out there. The doctors assumed she would live two more weeks.

It was less than two weeks. Four days later she died.

"At least we know she's safe now," Mom had choked out.

I should have died instead of her. I was the one they were always protecting, shielding from diseases, the frail girl of the family. Jade—my strong, determined older sister—was different.

It's been a month now.

February was always Jade's favorite month. "The best time for

track,” she’d joke with me. In truth, she did love running in it. Jade was never delicate and once she ran half a marathon in this weather. She came back with her fingers and toes frozen and frostbitten, and Mom wanted to take her to the doctor, but Jade just laughed and went to bed until noon the next morning.

The box is getting heavier in my pocket. I plant my feet into the wet sand and grope for something, anything, that will stop the tears. Like there’ll be a box of Kleenex somewhere on a beach. Now I’m crying, sobbing silently, as the orange-pink sun hovers just over the horizon and climbs the soft coral sky over me.

The water splashes quietly onto the shore and laps gently on my feet. I tear my flip-flops off and fling them away. “Why?” I scream.

I break down on a big piece of driftwood and stay silent for a moment. Then there’s a sound, a disturbance in my upset tranquility. Footsteps. It’s Mom.

“Hi, Cate,” she says softly, and sits down beside me. “What is it?”

“I miss Jade.” I’m still crying a bit, and Mom puts her arm around me, her silky blond hair brushing against my cheek.

“I know.” Mom looks out to the horizon. “I miss her, too.”

“Mom?” I lean against her shoulder. “Could—could she have lived?”

Mom bites her lip and takes her arm away from my shoulders. “I’ve

been thinking about it, and...no. We found out too late. I’m sorry, Cate. It’s my fault. I should’ve noticed earlier.”

“It’s not your fault,” I say in a wobbly voice. “Not at all.”

She turns away. “No, Cate...Catelyn Fuller, you don’t know what I know. I’ve spoken with the doctors. I’ve made sure. They said...they confirmed... that Jade would have lived if I’d gotten her there on time.”

Two swift dark cormorants whoosh by, nimble as they swoop over the rocks, racing silently to the water. The wind whistles quietly. Mom’s words echo in my head.

I take out Jade’s ashes from my pocket and set them back on the log. Mom turns around. “Oh my goodness,” she whispers hoarsely.

“You kept this?” she continues, and a tear trickles down her cheek.

“I thought I’d lost it. I’ve searched the house for this. Cate, I am so mad at you for stealing this but god, I’m happy to see it again!”

I ignore the fact that she’s never said that before and pick up the small box, cold in my hands, to press it into Mom’s ice-cold palms.

Her hands automatically curl protectively around it and she smiles sadly. “Jade,” she whispers, half to herself.

I stand up. “Mom?”

“Jade,” she says again. “I mean—yes, Cate?”

“You should head back,” I murmur, squeezing her wrist.

“I will.” She blinks back tears and

Now I’m crying, sobbing silently, as the orange-pink sun hovers just over the horizon and climbs the soft coral sky over me.

squeezes back. "I will!"

And she heads down the beach towards the dirt road back home.

It's quiet as she leaves. A crab scuttles towards my feet and buries itself in the sand.

I wipe my face on my sleeve. The waves ripple across the sand and I look up suddenly, startled as a slender white bird catches my eye.

Jade taught me well. We'd spent hours poring over her bird encyclopedia, memorizing each and every bird in the universe. "Chickadee," I can hear her saying in my mind. "Scientific name: *Poecile atricapillus*. Natural habitat: mixed evergreen forests and forest edges. Family: tit..."

I squint. It's a dove, it appears, but why is it here? Doves live in dense forests and woodlands, deserts and sometimes suburban areas in the southern U. S. But this is Souris, Prince Edward Island!

The dove starts arranging her feathers gracefully, preening its smooth white wings quietly. It rotates twice, looking for something I don't know of, then spots me. It stands stock still.

I hold my breath so it doesn't glide away, but finally exhale, my breath puffing out in the frosty air—I can see it—and the dove flutters the soft pink-white wings. To my surprise, it comes towards me on thin delicate legs, leaving a tiny imprint on the wet sand.

It emits a mournful, haunting noise like a loon, echoing in my ears. I shiver. "Hey," I breathe to it, directing my voice towards the bird, about forty meters away.

That was stupid, I think a second later, regretting my decision to try and

make a friend out of it. It won't be able to hear me.

But apparently it can hear me. It doesn't hesitate to keep going farther away from the water and towards me. It finally stops beside me—is it my imagination or not?—and starts scratching something in the sand with thin black claws.

A heart. But a heart with a little loop at the bottom, our family's code for something. The one that means I'm safe.

I stare at it quizzically. How?

A train of thought runs through my head so quickly I can barely think. What? How? Am I hallucinating? I must be.

The dove calls again, the same mourning sound, and disappears with a faint popping noise.

"I'll be back," I whisper to the spot where the dove disappeared, rising from my seat on the smooth driftwood and starting the walk home.

Honor Roll

Welcome to the *Stone Soup* Honor Roll. Every month we receive submissions from hundreds of kids from around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

Fiction

Makenna Bachman, 13
Isabelle Brault, 10
Kate Choi, 12
Amela Cucovic, 12
Nissi K. Flynn, 11
Ruth Gebhardt, 10
William Gruen, 13
Dyllan Han, 12
Cora Randall, 12
Sydney Sierck, 11
Nicholas Stone, 12
Megan Thomson, 13
Maya Viswanathan, 11

Poetry

Grace Artz, 11
Renatka Maria Kozlowksa, 12
Rose Rui, 11
Finn Shepherd-Humphrey, 9
Shelley Tang, 11
Nina Zhan, 9

Art

Eva Garrity Robbins, 12

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